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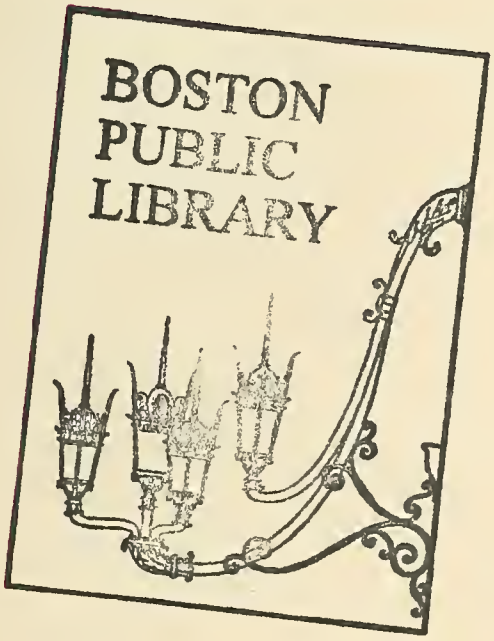
WORKING DRAFT
FOR
COMMUNITY REVIEW

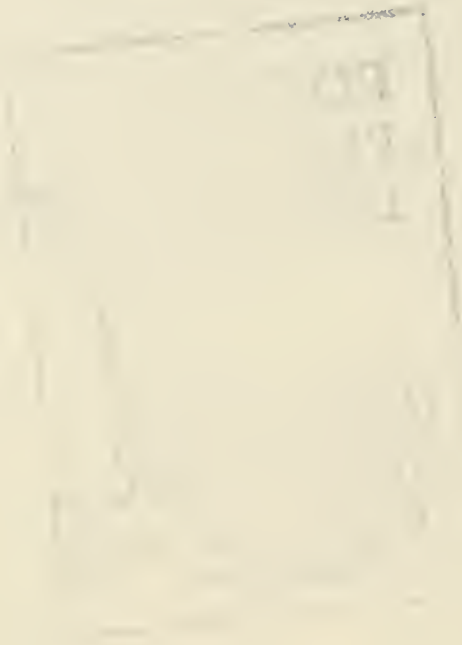
MATTAPAN

Background Information, Planning Issues and Preliminary Neighborhood Improvement Strategies



City of Boston
Boston Redevelopment Authority
District Planning Program

June, 1975



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INTRODUCTION

This report prepared by the Mattapan District Planner is a draft document meant to form the basis for discussion among residents and City representatives on planning strategies and investment needs.

The report does a number of things:

First, it establishes a base of population, income and housing data as well as a listing and analysis of recent past Public and Private Investment in the Mattapan Area. This information can be used by the District Planner and others who are involved in the planning process, neighborhood residents, Little City Hall Staff and other City agencies and departments.

Second, it offers an analysis of the major issues which confront the community along with recommended strategies. These strategies should form the basis of discussion for community residents for the Community Development Block Grant and Capital Improvement participation process as well as for involvement in issues which are not addressed by City expenditures, such as rezoning, private development, or wholly funded State Programs.

Third, the report recognizes that strategies are not self-fulfilling and makes recommendations for investments, both public and private, which are necessary to help carry through the recommended strategies.

Revere
Everett
Chelsea
Somerville
Winthrop
Watertown
Cambridge
Newton
Brookline
Quincy
Milton
Dedham

MATTAPAN

N

A. SHORT HISTORY

Mattapan was originally part of the Town of Dorchester, although it has developed its own separate character and identity. The name of the area was derived from the Mattahunt Indian Tribe, which inhabited large areas of Milton, Dedham, Dorchester, Roslindale and Mattapan. The earliest development in Mattapan was near Mattapan Square and along what is now Babson Street. Trolley service on Blue Hill Avenue in the 1890's created a residential construction boom around Wellington Hill, which was then built up with substantial two- and three-family homes and a few large single homes. The southern area of Mattapan has developed gradually since then, with single family homes on fairly large lots during the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's, and Garden Apartment Developments during the 1950's and 1960's.

In recent years, Mattapan has been threatened with the kind of neighborhood decline and abandonment which has occurred to the north, in Dorchester and Roxbury, but as yet this is not a severe problem.

Blue Hill Avenue is the center of the Mattapan area, especially at Mattapan Square. Traditionally, the shops along the Avenue served virtually all the needs of the residents on nearby streets, who would walk down to see friends and shop, or who would ride the trolley home from work and buy food or other needs on the way home. The elimination of the trolley in the 1950's and competition from newer car-oriented suburban shopping centers has caused some decline along Blue Hill Avenue, except at the Square, where the City has made a major commitment to its revitalization. The Square now has one of the lowest store vacancy rates (3%) of any of the City's older shopping areas.

B. EXISTING CHARACTERISTICS

Information on population and housing in this report is dervied primarily from the 1970 U. S. Census and 1960 U. S. Census. For purposes of analysis, the Mattapan area has been divided into 3 sub-areas: (1) Wellington Hill, (2) Western Mattapan and (3) Eastern Mattapan. (See Map of Sub-areas, and Table of Comparative Statistics.)

WELLINGTON HILL

The northern portion of Mattapan is located on and around a hill, and is bounded by Morton Street, the Penn Central Railroad tracks, a short segment of Blue Hill Avenue, Almont Street, Walk Hill Street, and Harvard Street. This area underwent racial change in the 1960's, but other demographic characteristics of the population did not change significantly and the neighborhood remains a predominantly middle-class suburan area.

The homes and yards on Wellington Hill are generally well maintained by owner-occupants. Abandonment has increased recently primarily due to mortgage foreclosure, often due to major repairs for which the owner doesn't have the cash and can't get a home repair loan. Most of the abandoned buildings belong to the FHA.

HIGHWAY
TALBOT
AVENUE
STREET
LEGION
MORTON
BOSTON
STATE
HOSPITAL
AMERICAN
WALK
HILL
AVENUE
WOODROW
AVENUE
RAIL
ROAD
ST.
WELLINGTON
HILL ST.
HARVARD
ALMONT
ST.
WELLINGTON
HILL
NORTH
ST.
ST.
GALLIVAN BLVD
STREET
MESSINGER
STREET
STREET
WEST SELDEN
AVE.
WESTERN
MATTAPAN
ST.
EASTERN
MATTAPAN
ST.
ITASCA
ST.
WOODHAVEN
HILL
BABSON
GLADESIDE
CUMMINS
HIGHWAY
BLUE
MILTON
MATTAPAN
SQ.
CENTRAL
RIVER
PENN
SUB-AREAS
MATTAPAN
0 600 1200 2400 FEET
N

WESTERN MATTAPAN

The western area of Mattapan is bounded by Blue Hill Avenue, Almont Street, Harvard Street, Cummins Highway, Greenfield Street, and the Neponset River. This is an area where median income and Black population has increased since 1960, total population has also increased, largely due to the construction of new garden apartment complexes.

This is one of Boston's newest residential areas - most of the buildings are less than 40 years old. Housing conditions are good to excellent throughout the neighborhood. However, many residents feel threatened by the deterioration and abandonment to the north along Blue Hill Avenue. Abandonment is infrequent in this area, but has increased in the past few years. Almost all of the abandoned houses are foreclosures which now belong to the FHA.

EASTERN MATTAPAN

The Eastern section of Mattapan is bounded by Blue Hill Avenue, the Penn Central railroad tracks, Morton Street, Maryknoll Street, Freeland Street, and the Neponset River. Population in this neighborhood increased slightly since 1960. This integrated area contains a mix of Irish, Jewish, Black and other ethnic groups. Median income increased slightly, and is about equal to the city as a whole.

The houses range in age from 20 years to 150 years old, and are in good to excellent condition. Two of Boston's most desirable public housing projects are in this area: the new elderly development on River Street, and the two-family duplexes in the Gallivan-Morton Project for families. Abandonment is rare, and virtually all the abandoned houses are FHA foreclosures.

Comparative Statistics - Mattapan

1970 U.S. Census Data

Population	Wellington Hill	Western Mattapan	Eastern Mattapan	District	City
Total 1970	9,428	5,099	6,110	20,637	639,657
Change from '60	+2%	+16%	+8%	+9%	-8%
Total Black 1970	4,539	420	170	5,129	104,200
Change from '60	4	30	14	48	63,400
Aged 0-14 yrs. - 1970	2,847	1,100	1,010	4,957	
Change from '60	+18%	+9%	+5%	+12%	
Aged 64 yrs. & over	1,413	1,150	1,815	4,378	81,437
Change from '60	-23%	-7%	-4%	-17%	-5%
Income					
Median Family Income	$8,350	$11,200	$9,900	$9,500	$ 9,133
Change from '60	+2%	+8%	+5%	+5%	+20%
% Families under $5,000	22%	10%	16%	16%	22%
Housing					
Total Dwelling Units	3,118	1,971	1,950	7,039	232,856
Units Needing Fix-up in excess of $1000	354	230	95	679	67,102
%Owner Occupied Structures of 1-4 units	85%	90%	85%	87%	80%
Mobility of Residents-Residence less than 5 years	68%	42%	39%	52%	50%

C. PAST PUBLIC INVESTMENT

In the past 6 years most of the public investment in Mattapan has been spent on many small public works improvement and modernization projects. Since 1968, the City spent approximately $630,000 on street and sidewalk reconstruction and resurfacing, sewer and water projects and residential street lighting.

The City spent about $250,000 on improvements in the Mattapan Square commercial area, for street repairs, sidewalk redesign and reconstruction, new lighting, trees, benches, ets. This was the first in a series of major public improvement projects intended to help revitalize older neighborhood shopping areas.

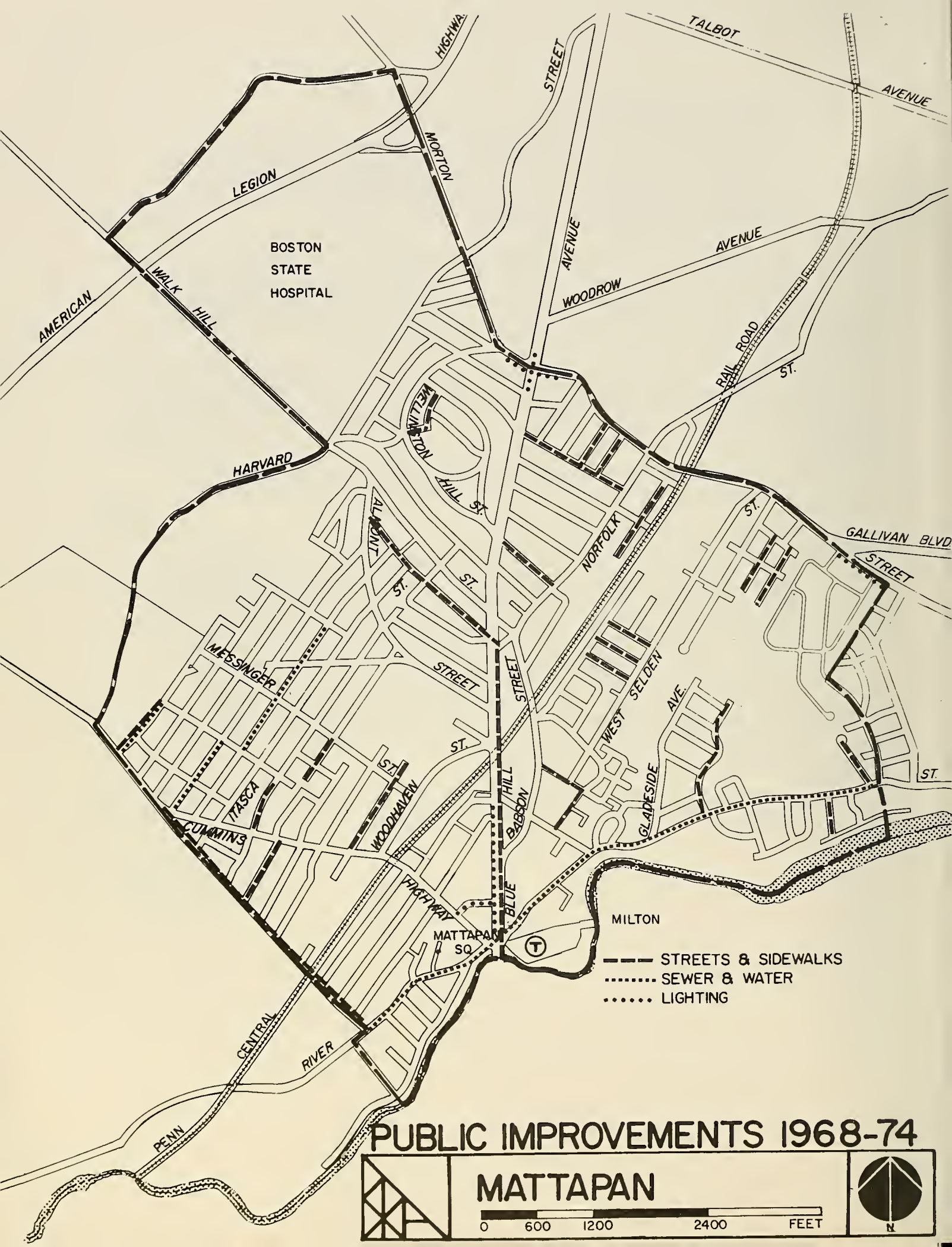
An indoor recreation building was constructed behind the Gallivan-Morton Housing Project, at a cost of $300,000. Major repairs and new equipment were provided at Almont Playground and Walker Playground for $190,000.

The Boston Housing Authority built 64 units of elderly housing just off River Street next to the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital.

PAST PRIVATE INVESTMENT

There has been substantial private construction in Mattapan in recent years, primarily in residential and commercial developments. Many stores and offices in Mattapan Square have been modernized and there has been storefront rehabilitation and new construction on Cummins Highway. There have been several small townhouse apartment complexes built in Southern Mattapan near River Street and Cummins Highway; Morton Village, with 208 apartments near Morton Street, was completed in 1968, and Fairlawn Apartments, with 250 rental units was completed in 1969. This continues a pattern started in the late 1950's and early 1960's, when approximately 500 apartments were built in Southern Mattapan.

Last year, Star Market completed a very large modern supermarket and discount drug store next to Morton Village.



PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS 1968-74

MATTAPAN

0 600 1200 2400 FEET

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1. ALMONT PLAYGROUND
2. WALKER PLAYGROUND
3. GALLIVAN-MORTON RECREATION BLDG.
4. ELDERLY HOUSING PROJECT
5. POLICE STATION 3 RENOVATIONS

PUBLIC FACILITIES 1968-74

MATTAPAN

0 600 1200 2400 FEET

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HIGHWAY
TALBOT
AVENUE
STREET
MORTON
LEGION
BOSTON
STATE
HOSPITAL
AMERICAN
WALK
HILL
AVENUE
WOODROW
AVENUE
RAIL ROAD
ST.
HARVARD
WELLINGTON
HILL ST.
ALMONT
ST.
ST.
NORFOLK
ST.
GALLIVAN BLVD
STREET
MESSINGER
STREET
STREET
WEST SELDEN
AVE.
ST.
ST.
ITASCA
WOODHAVEN
HILL
BABSON
GLADESIDE
ST.
CUMMINS
HIGHWAY
BLUE
MILTON
MATTAPAN
SQ.
CENTRAL
RIVER
PENN
RENOVATED NEW
RESIDENTIAL
COMMERCIAL
PRIVATE INVESTMENT 1968-74
MATTAPAN
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D. ISSUES AND PRELIMINARY STRATEGIES

1. HOUSING ABANDONMENT AND NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION

Issue

Housing abandonment has become a serious concern of residents in Mattapan in recent years. Abandonment has many causes: fire, crime, lack of mortgage or home improvement loans, disinvestment by absentee owners, inability of tenants or homeowners to pay the full cost of the housing they occupy, mortgage or tax foreclosure, etc. Owners or tenants living near abandoned buildings lose confidence in the neighborhood, and cut back on maintenance and/or move out the area. Thus abandonment leads to further neighborhood decline and more abandonment.

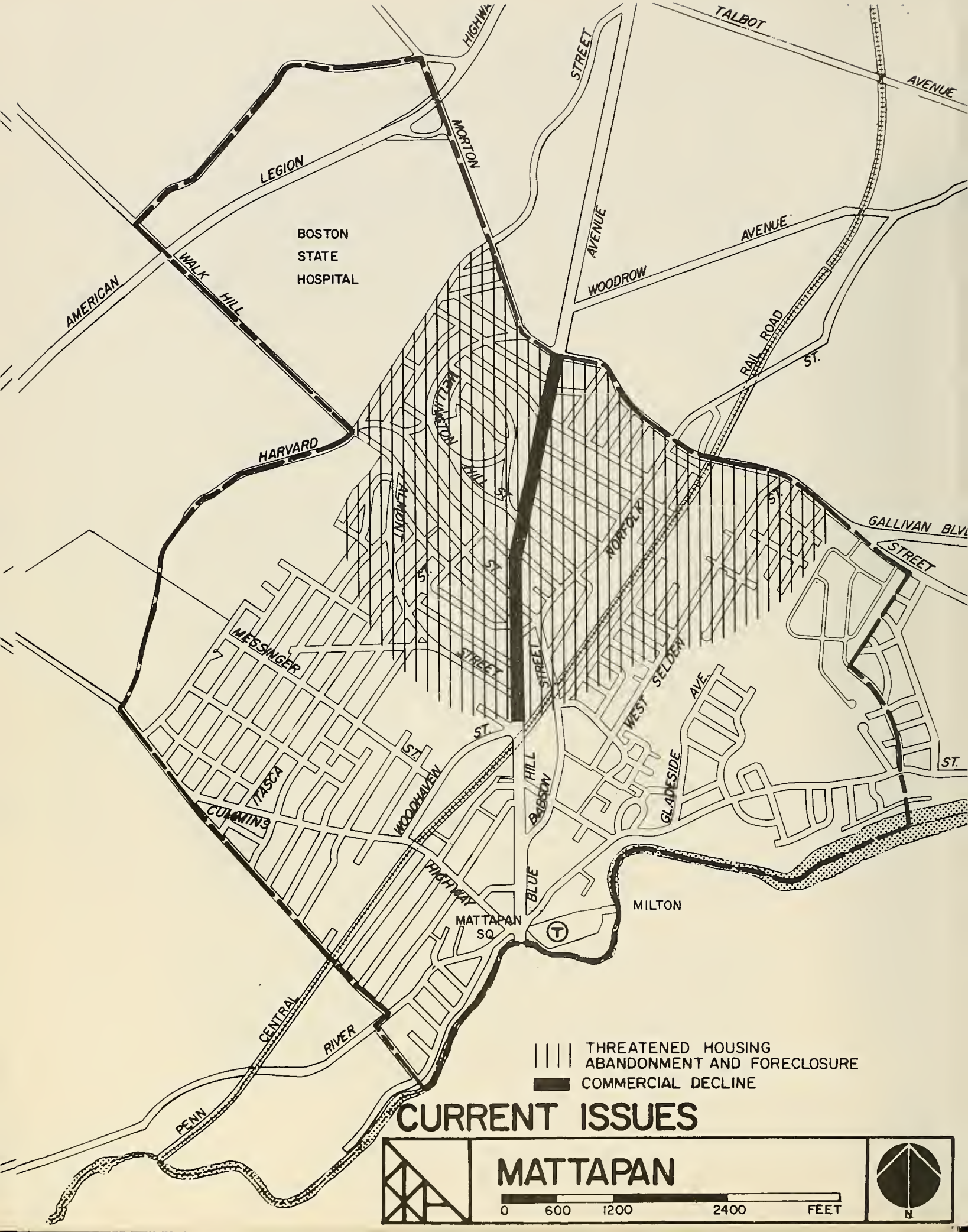
Strategy

In order to effectively reverse the self-reinforcing process of abandonment and decline, both abandoned buildings and occupied houses needing repair must be treated.

The new Housing Improvement Program which gives homeowners a cash grant of 20% of the cost of needed repairs will enable many owners to improve their property. This program will also help owners secure home improvement loans. Visible repairs in a neighborhood can start a positive cycle of restored confidence and additional repairs by owners who realize their neighbors are staying and working. To reinforce this positive effect, the Housing Improvement Program should conduct a door-to-door public relations campaign in selected target areas, for instance Wellington Hill, for maximum visibility and impact. The Housing Inspection Department should inspect badly dilapidated buildings in these target areas, to attempt to force the repair of "eyesores" which discourage nearby homeowners from making expensive repairs.

The city and community must work together to encourage banks to give mortgages and home repair loans in this area. The State Banking Commissioner has now ordered banks to disclose the geographic pattern of their deposits and loans. When this information is available, the city should work closely with community groups, local banks, and the Banking Commission to develop policies or legislation that will prevent "red-lining".

The City should proceed with a major public relations effort to promote confidence on the part of current residents, and also to encourage replacement buyers to seek housing in Dorchester, Franklin Field and Mattapan. Promotional brochures should be published highlighting neighborhood preservation and rehabilitation efforts, areas of architectural and historic interest, new or innovative public and private improvements, and the general quality of life available in this area of Boston.


HIGHWA
STREET
TALBOT
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MORTON
LEGION
BOSTON
STATE
HOSPITAL
AMERICAN
WALK HILL
AVENUE
AVENUE
WOODROW
RAIL ROAD
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HARVARD
WELLINGTON HILL
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WOODHAVEN
HILL
BABSON
GLADESIDE
PARKWAY
BLUE
MILTON
MATTAPAN
SQ.
CENTRAL
RIVER
PENN
THREATENED HOUSING
ABANDONMENT AND FORECLOSURE
COMMERCIAL DECLINE
CURRENT ISSUES
MATTAPAN
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There are vacant lots from house demoliton scattered throughout the residential neighborhoods in Mattapan. Most of these lots are or will be owned by the City, under the new Vacant Lot Program, the abutters will be offered these lots at very low cost, to enlarge their yards for gardens, play areas, or parking. This program will transform a community liability into a community asset.

Boston's ongoing Capital Improvement Program should be planned so as to have the maximum positive impact on neighborhood stabilization. The residential areas where the Housing Improvement Program will be concentrating should also be scheduled for public works, as needed, for instance street and sidewalk repairs, street lights, water and sewer improvements and street trees.

This coordinated program of positive forces will hopefully combine to reverse the circle of despair and dilapidation.

To effectively deal with abandoned buildings, the City must establish a process of fast condemnation, fast board-up, fast decision and rehabilitation possibilities, and fast demolition when needed. The City should also try various incentives to encourage new homeowners to acquire and repair structurally sound buildings. Possible incentives would be: an increased Housing Improvement Program Grant, tax forgiveness for 3 to 5 years after purchase, or some labor provided by the City from the Federal Comprehensive Employment Training Act Program.

In a few areas, for instance Leston Street and Fottler Road, large tracts of vacant land will result form the demolition of unsalvageable buildings. These large lots should be held for future development, and the City should work with nearby residents, developers, and banks to plan appropriate reuses for these potentially valuable pieces of land.

2. BLUE HILL AVENUE REVITALIZATION

Issue

The Blue Hill Avenue shopping corridor has also suffered abandonment and decline. During the riots in 1968, many stores were vandalized or burnt. Shopkeepers lost confidence and moved out as soon as they could or stayed but did not modernize thier stores or update their inventory. Shopping habits have been changing, favoring large stores and suburban-style shopping centers to the detriment of many older shopping areas with small stores and very little convenient parking.

Strategy

Blue Hill Avenue is the heart of this district, and it must be restored as the center of community and business activity. Initial efforts have thus far focused on Mattapan Square, where the City has made improvements designed to encourage shoppers to come to the Square. Expenditures for street and sidewalk improvements, lighting, off-street parking, and tree planting have totalled approximately $250,000. This fairly modest investment has led local businessmen to fix up their stores both inside and out and has attracted new stores and offices to the Square; private improvements completed or planned will total at least $4,000,000, and the commercial vacancy rate has declined to 3%.

Similar improvements should be made in the shopping areas at Morton Street and Walk Hill Street. But there are stores and other buildings along Blue Hill Avenue outside of these economically viable shoppings nodes; the City should encourage the conversion of the excess commercial property to other uses such as housing, recreation, cultural facilities, or job producing businesses.

The City should also provide technical assistance and cash grants for the rehabilitation of storefronts on Blue Hill Avenue. A small off-street parking area should be developed for the convenience of shoppers at Walk Hill Street.

E. 1975 INVESTMENT PROGRAM

The City's Investment Program for 1975 in Mattapan will be an effective contribution to neighborhood prservation and improvement. $12.7 million has been committed, both from the City's Capital Budget and from Federal Community Development Revenue Sharing Funds.

CDRS funds will be concentrated heavily on Housing Preservation Programs. Approximately $350,000 will be spent for Housing Improvement Program Grants, demolition and boarding of vacant buildings, and restoration and sale of vacant lots. Residential neighborhoods will also benefit from reconstruction and repair of streets and sidewalks, and residential street lighting at a cost of at least $1.5 million.

A new elementary school is being built in western Mattapan at a cost of $11.2 million. The gym and swimming pool will open in 1975, and will be available for community use.

The major improvements at Mattapan Square will be completed with an $80,000 parking lot, and a program for revitalization of the rest of Blue Hill Avenue will begin with the installation of commercial area street lighting at the Walk Hill Street shopping area. The program for the Avenue will be continued and expanded in subsequent years to change the image of this major road, Which is the heart of the community and a symbol of Mattapan to thousands of people.

1. MATTAPAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL
2. MATTAPAN SQ. OFF-STREET PARKING
3. WALKER HILL ST. COMMERCIAL LIGHTING
4. WALKER PLGD.
5. HIP SITE OFFICE

1975 INVESTMENT PROGRAM

MATTAPAN

0 600 1200 2400 FEET

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F. FUTURE INVESTMENT NEEDS

The City should continue its program for neighborhood revitalization in Mattapan. Special emphasis should be placed on the Housing Improvement Program and funds should be reserved for at least 300 buildings per year. Future needs for demolition and boarding will be more modest, on the order of 15 demolitions and 20 board-ups per year. The vacant lot program should be continued with all appropriate city-owned lots. Neighborhood capital improvements should be accelerated, especially street and sidewalk reconstruction and tree planting. The City should select a site and begin the development of a Comprehensive Community Center for Mattapan.

The improvement program for Mattapan Square should be completed and a revitalization program for the rest of Blue Hill Avenue should be started. The City should develop a storefront rehab incentive program, like H.I.P., and start it in Mattapan Square and Blue Hill Avenue.

G FUTURE INVESTMENT NEEDS as related to issues, strategies and 1975 Investment Program

Issue	Strategy	1975 Investment Program	Future Investment Needs
Housing Abandonment and Neighborhood Stabilization	Housing Fix-up	HIP = $125,000	HIP - At least 300 Buildings Per Year
	"Code Enforcement" in HIP Target Areas		Provide Staff Support for Informal "Eyesore" Code Enforcement
	Vacant Lot Sales	Vacant Lot Program = $40,000	Vacant Lot Program at Least 50 Lots Per Year
	Mortgages and Home Improvement Loans		
	Capital Improvements in Neighborhoods - e.g., Streets, Sidewalks, Trees, Water & Sewers, Street Lights, Parks	PWD-$1,000,000, Walker Playground = $80,000 River Street - Major Reconstruction City of Boston Construction = $500,000 Mass. DPW Contribution = $4,500,000	Continue Public Works Improvements Plant Trees on Streets With High Owner Occupancy Continue Improvements to Neighborhood Parks Develop a Mattapan Comprehensive Community Center
	Demolition of Worst Buildings	Demolition Program = $175,000	Continue Demolitions, Approx. 20 Buildings Per Year
	Board-up Abandoned Buildings if Salvageable	Boarding Program = $25,000	Continue Board-up, Approx. 20 Buildings Per Year

G FUTURE INVESTMENT NEEDS as related to issues, strategies and 1975 Investment Program

Issue	Strategy	1975 Investment Program	Future Investment Needs
	Restore Abandoned Housing to Use by Tax Forgiveness, CETA, etc.		Commitment from City Treasurer and/or Assessor to Forgive Taxes plus HIP
	Redevelop Large Vacant Parcels		Land Assembly
Blue Hill Avenue Revitalization	Complete Mattapan Square Improvements	Off-street parking on Cummins Highway - $90,000	Storefront Rehab Program for the Square
	Encourage Private Housing Development at Fringes of the Square		
	Commercial Area Improvements at Walk Hill St., Morton St.	Walk Hill St. Lighting - $20,000 Morton St. Lighting - $30,000	Storefront Rehab, off-street Parking, Trees and Benches, etc.